Robbin' Crook

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Summary: There's nothing quite as sweet as the irony of a name. They once called Ylisstol the City of Peace; now it's anything but. So steeped with the underworld and crime, there really is no better place than Ylisstol to have raised the criminal now known as the Tactician. Male!Robin, crime/steampunk/fantasy AU, currently gen.

Chapter 1: Robbin' Crook

A/N: This is a seriously self-indulgent AU of mine, mixing together steampunk elements with crime and fantasy (because I can't imagine Robin without his magic; can you?). The chapters will be short, and updates will take a while.

A keen grey eye was watching the scrawny, dirty figure of a teenager at the other side of the room; watching him pace and prowl, not unlike a cornered world in its cage; watching him stare back with equally keen eyes.

He was already known as the Tactician despite his young age of nineteen.

The kid had hair as white as snow, they said, under the film of grime that clung to him perpetually. He was tiny, too, with his meager frame having withered further due to malnutrition. His clavicles jutted out from under his collar, and his ribs poked out from under his shirt, yet his skin wasn't riddled with disease: a mark of a hardy survivor—and a skilled one, at that.

The kid could've been taken for an impoverished local thanks to the delicate structure of his face, or the paleness of his hair. However, his skin was very atypical for an Ylissian, being the rich shade of unpolished rose gold.

He was probably a kid of an illegal foreigner, either Feroxi or Plegian.

Basilio would place his bet on his being a Plegian, even if Plegians mostly had grey or blue eyes. No Feroxi would have eyes that were green enough to rival the purest of emeralds—and Basilio, indeed, could compare them accurately without much room for doubt.

He had, after all, handled more than his fair share over the years.

Nearing his fifties, the Feroxi crimelord had been steeped in the underworld for—just under forty years. Having fought his way to the top with nothing but his gun, a grin, and bloodshed since the young age of nine, his name was infamous and feared—more so when even Flavia would admit her respect for him without hesitation or question.

And it was this experience that allowed Basilio to look at the kid in front of him and see the potential hiding within his tiny figure—though whether he wanted to nurture it or not was the question.

Should he take the risk and let a potential threat to grow under his watch? Or snuff it out before it could endanger his position?

He watched the child pace nervously under his stony gaze.

Seconds ticked by, merging into minutes.

Lines of stress slowly appeared on the child's face, creasing his eyebrows. His golden skin slowly blanched, and he edged away from the men that lined the walls of the room, who readied their weapons for any sign of a signal from their leader.

—but he didn't run.

Though nervousness was clear in his expression, in the lines of his body, the child stared back at him with worried, defiant eyes. Chipped emerald blazed like fire as weak shoulders stiffened again.

Amused and pleased, Basilio finally spoke.

"You had the balls to come over here, to demand a job?" Basilio asked, his lips curled into a wide grin, and a curious glint to his features. Just how far could this kid go, when given the opportunity? "You certainly look like you need it." Derision was obvious in his voice, but the boy paid it no mind.

The child merely nodded, features set with a determination that rather pleased Basilio.

If the child was really as stubborn as he'd shown himself to be, he was bound to be no pushover—and that was something the crimelord could respect. Especially in one as powerless as a duct rat such as him.

"Hn… Tell you what. I'm going to give you a fighting chance for it." Basilio said finally, leaning back into his throne with a challenging smirk on his face. The kid finally bristled, reacting to the sheer lack of belief in his expression. "If you can find Lon'qu, *he'll* be the one to give you your job… and your coin."

The dismissal was clear.

The kid's eyes flared in fury at being disregarded so quickly, with nary a thought spared for his potential, but he stayed quiet even in the face of unfair treatment.

Robin Crooks left the man with a curt nod and a clenched fist.

How he'd ended up with his name had been a joke, at first.

The kid's a thief, they'd said, chortling at the sight of a grimy and scruffy child getting kicked out onto the curb, denied of all that he'd managed to pocket in the scant few minutes he'd been in the store. *He be robbin' us all of our money, that mangy chit.*

Born nameless on the streets by an equally nameless woman—save for the words *Plegian whore* that was all that would pass through the lips of those who passed them by, jeered at and fondled and eventually captured to be sold like cattle—, those words had followed him from then on.

Little whispers of *robber* and *thief* and *street rat* were the names he took up, wielding them like a shield and a mask to finally identify him from the rest of the filth that lay beneath Ylisstol's shining surface.

Seven and an orphan, he was brighter than the rest of the gutter children with which he grew up.

Speaking the childish tongue of Plegia, he soon learned Ylissian under the eyes of disapproving priests, then Feroxi, and finally the bloody traditions of the Chon'sin, which had so influenced the underworld.

He was the *Robbin' Kid*, and he'd soon been named by a strange man who'd taken him in—a man called an ironic *Prim 'n Proper Priam*—and ended up as Robin Crooks, ace of all trades and master in magic.

Not many, after all, could claim to be nineteen years old, with an extensive criminal record that could rival those double his age.

And so, though still relatively unknown, Robin was more than skilled—and resources enough—to find this sole man, elusive though he may be.

It took him two weeks and a few days to find the man.

The first week saw him on the streets, in the guise of a street urchin begging for coin with the most meager of magic tricks as he scouted out the back alleys of Ylisstol.

The men and women that often plied their trade on the corners of streets in the depths of the night had taken pity on him on his ninth day, and he'd been able to pry out rumours and food from them with slow batting of his eyelashes and a few coins.

They'd always fallen for his eyes, so bright and exotic for a boy of his colouring and background.

Just from his name alone, Lon'qu, Robin knew he was looking for a Chon'sin in the midst of Ylissians and Feroxi. But that was easier said than done; there were thousands of Chon'sin immigrants hiding within the depths of Ylisstol. (*A Plegian would've been easier to find, a Plegian like Robin.*)

They told him of a mysterious man whose appearances often heralded turf wars—and those bearing a green emblem with the sigil of cross blades as he did were always the victors.

Lon'qu had been a hard man to find, even with his distinctive Chon'sin features and the thick Feroxi brogue that coloured his words.

But with the rumours and relentless pursuit, the Tactician had soon been able to locate him within a seedy tavern, filled with the heady smoke of poppies.

Robin's eyes narrowed upon the man with his chin jutted out arrogantly as he walked up to him. He could feel the eyes of Lon'qu's men fix upon him, judging him and apparently finding him wanting as they looked away with a snort.

Only Lon'qu's eyes were fixed upon him without derision, and instead a wary kind of approval.

That was the kind of look Robin had been waiting for.

Letting a smirk appear on his lips, he brushed back dusty white hair from his face. The men in the background cackled at the distinctively feminine action, accentuated by the ragged length it had grown to, but Robin ignored that as well.

"Basilio promised me a job."

Even if his appearance was frail, scrawny, feminine, the maturity of his voice was one that never failed to ruin people's preconceptions of him. Robin found it hilarious to see just how quickly people's expressions changed the moment he spoke with his deep voice.

"He said you'd appear soon enough," Lon'qu said finally, setting down his tankard of ale onto the table.

The man got up, his imposing height towering over Robin. Giving him a quick once over, he then gestured for Robin to follow him.

"Come this way."